

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Mid-Pacific Region
Sacramento, California

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

**Riparian Hardwoods Restoration and Enhancement
Burton Creek State Park, D.L. Bliss State Park, Ed Z'berg-Sugar Pine
Point State Park, Ward Creek Unit, and Washoe Meadows State Park**

Recommended: *Douglas Kleinsmith* Date: May 7, 2007
Douglas Kleinsmith
Environmental Specialist

Concur: *Myrnie Mayville* Date: May 18, 2007
Myrnie Mayville
Environmental Specialist

Approved: *Robert Eckert* Date: 6/5/07
for Susan M. Fry
Regional Environmental Officer

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Background

Purpose and Need

The purpose of this project is to restore and enhance riparian hardwood forest in California State Parks in the Lake Tahoe Basin by removing the encroaching conifer forest to retain the riparian habitat character and treating the sediment sources by rehabilitating bare areas and unnecessary travel routes located in the riparian corridors. This will reduce erosion, improve in-stream and riparian habitat, improve wildlife habitat, improve water quality, and reduce hazardous fuels.

These riparian hardwood forests have been disappearing in the basin due to previous land conversion and development and degradation due to conifer encroachment. In addition, these forests have a legacy of old logging skid roads, other roads, and trails no longer needed for park and forest management. These features serve as sources of sediment entering the stream courses and contributing to the reduction of Lake Tahoe's famed clarity.

Proposed Action

The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) and the California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) propose to restore and enhance approximately 200 acres of riparian forests by removing encroaching conifers and remove approximately 0.5 mile of unnecessary roads, skid trails, and way trails that are sediment sources in the riparian corridors within 787 identified acres at Burton Creek, D.L. Bliss, Ed Z'berg-Sugar Pine Point, and Washoe Meadows State Parks and Ward Creek Unit. DPR will implement the project. Reclamation will provide partial funding for the proposed action under the Lake Tahoe Regional Wetlands Development Program.

Work throughout the park units will include:

- Removal of encroaching conifers on up to 200 acres in the identified riparian corridors using manual removal with hand crews and/or heavy equipment over snow.
- California State Park-registered professional forester will determine thinning prescription on a site by site basis based on: riparian forest health, ability to remove felled trees and associated tree debris, and in consultation with regulatory agencies and State Park's cultural and natural resources staff.
- Removal of encroaching conifers in the riparian corridor manually by hand crews.
- Removal of encroaching conifers in the riparian corridor may be completed using heavy equipment over snow at three parks:
 - Sugar Pine Point State Park up to 41 acres
 - D.L. Bliss State Park up to 4.5 acres
 - Washoe Meadows State Park up to 28 acres
- Removal of felled trees and debris out of riparian corridor for pile burning, chipping, or disposal depending on vehicle accessibility. Pile burning will be done in designated areas agreed upon by regulatory agencies and State Park natural and cultural resources staff.

- Obliteration and rehabilitation of approximately 0.5 miles of skid road, skid trail, and way trails in the riparian corridor. This may include hand crews and/or small and heavy equipment.

Findings

Reclamation and DPR prepared a final Initial Study/Environment Assessment (IS/EA) in March 2007 which analyzed the impacts of the project. Based upon the analysis in the IS/EA, Reclamation found that there were no significant impacts. The reasons why the impacts of the Proposed Action, which are discussed in detail in the IS/EA, are not significant are summarized as follows:

1. Cultural Resources - The proposed project will have no adverse affect on any of the identified cultural resources that are assumed eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (National Register). Within the Area of Potential Effects (APE), 67 cultural resources were identified. For the purposes of this undertaking and this undertaking only, DPR and Reclamation assume that all the cultural resources within the APE are historic properties eligible for inclusion in the National Register.

Reclamation consulted with the California State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) pursuant to the Federal Regulations at 36 CFR Part 800. The consultation package presented to the SHPO included the assumption of eligibility for all the cultural resources in the APE. Based on this assumption, Reclamation concluded that the project would have no adverse effect on historic properties within the APE if all the mitigation measures are implemented. The SHPO concurred with Reclamation's finding adding that Reclamation may have additional future responsibilities for this specific undertaking in the event of an unanticipated cultural resource discovery or that in the event resources flagged for avoidance are disturbed during the project implementation.

In the event of an inadvertent discovery of previously undocumented cultural resources during these specific project activities or in the event that flagged cultural resource areas are disturbed, work will be suspended in the area until the impacts can be assessed by either a qualified DPR District or DPR Service Center archaeologist in coordination with a Reclamation archeologist. The work will resume upon implementing an appropriate avoidance, preservation, or recovery measure pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800.13 in consultation with the SHPO.

2. Indian Trust Assets – The Project will not affect Indian Trust Assets (ITAs). ITAs are legal interests in property or rights held in trust by the United States for Indian Tribes or individual Indians. Indian reservations, Rancherias, and Public Domain Allotments are common ITAs in California. No Indian trust lands or assets are present within the five park units of the project. This project will not affect the concessions at Meeks Bay Resort or impact the vegetation resources at Meeks Creek; therefore no impacts to Indian Trust Assets will occur as a result of this project.

3. Environmental Justice - Implementing the Project will not disproportionately affect the human health or environment of minority populations or low-income populations.

4. Water Quality and Soils - The Project will not significantly affect water quality of the area. Heavy equipment for tree removal will only be used over snow. Hand crews will begin work in late summer and/or fall when soils are driest. When hauling out trees and debris, neither hand crews nor heavy equipment will cross streams. During trail removal in riparian corridors, Best Management Practices (BMPs) will be implemented to prevent sediment from reaching the waterways.

5. Hazards and Hazardous Materials - The Project will not significantly affect hazards and hazardous materials. All equipment will be inspected by the operators for leaks immediately prior to the start of construction, and regularly inspected thereafter until equipment is removed from project locations. Areas will be designated for refueling, lubrication, and maintenance of equipment. Best management practices (BMP) will be employed as appropriate and necessary to contain, collect and dispose of hazardous materials. Hazardous materials will be lawfully disposed of outside of park boundaries.

6. Air Quality - The Project will not significantly affect air quality. State Parks will write a smoke management plan (SMP) that includes identifying smoke sensitive areas (i.e., residences in project vicinity, schools, etc.) and submit it to the appropriate air quality regulator, El Dorado Air Quality Management District or the Placer Air Pollution Control District, for approval. Vehicles will drive 15 miles per hour or slower when driven over dirt roads to minimize the creation of dust. Pile burning will be conducted in project areas, outside of stream zones, where there is no vehicle access or feasible method to remove the tree remains and debris from the project site. Piles will be cured a year before burning to reduce the amount of smoke and chemical emissions. Where accessible, the tree slash and debris will be chipped and hauled away. Where accessible, tree and downed woody biomass will be removed to reduce smoke emissions. Depending on the soil dryness and wind conditions, the trail removal and rehabilitation areas will be sprayed with water to hinder windborne dust.

7. Fire Safety – The Project will not increase the risk of wildfires. A fire risk analysis and a fire complexity rating will be done for each of the five units. If the risk is significant and the fire complexity rating is high for any unit, DPR will write a burn plan for the unit. The burn plan would specify the conditions under which burning would be allowed.

8. Noise - The Project will not significantly affect noise levels. Manual tree removal and trail obliteration activities will be limited to the daylight hours, Monday – Friday. Over snow tree removal in areas adjacent or near residential housing neighborhoods will begin at 8 a.m. and stop by 6 p.m. Internal combustion engines used for any purpose at the job site will be equipped with a muffler of a type recommended by the manufacturer.

9. Biological Resources and Wetlands - The Project will not adversely affect plant communities, animal communities or wetlands. Perennial wet areas with unusual plants and communities will be excluded from tree removal. Hand crews will be used to remove trees instead of heavy equipment during snow free months and in late summer to fall to decrease impacts to soil and vegetation. Over-snow heavy equipment operations will be implemented in winter and early spring in limited and accessible areas when snow pack is of adequate depth and temperature/hardness to prevent damage to the underlying vegetation and moist soils beneath.

To prevent the spread of invasive plants motorized equipment used for trail removal and rehabilitation will be washed of plant parts and soil if it had been working in areas known to have invasive plants and/or at park units outside of the Lake Tahoe basin. Local soil and mulch gathered from the project site vicinity will be primarily used for the removed trail rehabilitation to decrease the chance of introducing invasive non-native plants.

Tree removal and trail obliteration/rehabilitation using hand crews will occur in the late summer and fall after the wildlife young are mobile and dispersing. Over-snow tree removal will occur in the winter and early spring prior to wildlife mating and breeding activities. Tree marking prescription will allow for some areas of high density trees as places of refuge and other habitat in riparian corridors and along meadows. The prescription will avoid removing a number of trees that will contribute to increasing the water temperature and removal of shade cover of fish habitat. Sensitive raptor habitat will be protected by surveying and avoidance.

10. Threatened and Endangered Species - The Project will not affect threatened and endangered species. No federally-listed or proposed species occur in the project area. Non-listed sensitive species will be protected by surveying and avoidance.